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ABSTRACT

This book is a practical guide to librarians and their administrators who are thinking about or in the early stages of providing virtual reference service. Part 1, "The Decision to Go Virtual," provides a context for thinking about virtual reference, including the benefits and problems, getting in the virtual frame of mind, and shopping for software. Part 2, "The Process of Moving to the Virtual Desk," contains the nitty-gritty of providing a virtual reference service: checklists for choosing software, exercises that provide practice in using the new skills required in the chat environment, guides for designing the service's Web space, and a structure for developing new library policies related to the service. Part 3, "Techniques for Building a Lively Service," is about marketing and publicizing, including recommendations for staying in touch with patrons' changing needs and preferences and accommodating those needs by re-evaluating existing services and making changes accordingly; it also has tips for making the library's virtual reference service known and evaluating its success. Appendices include: a survey about the reasons for and nature of reference questions; information on neutral questioning; excerpts from library virtual reference service policies and scripted messages; references to accounts of experiences; tips for communicating in a virtual reference chat transaction; and a description of an ideal training and learning environment. (MES)